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ABSTRACT

After listing the constraints on publicly-supported institutions, the author insists that higher education institutions are still free to revitalize liberal education, shorten the curricula, revise subject matter requirements, and even to alter drastically the internal system of governance. Higher education is crowded with tasks solely within the competence of the individual college or university such as equal access for all ages, improved career training, and curriculum development. Instead of lamenting the lack of governance on campus, higher education should become involved in what can actually be done on campus. (PG)

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WHAT'S LEFT ON CAMPUS TO GOVERN -- OR TOWARD THE END OF LAMENTATIONS

In some Arcadia found only in treasured memory or, more likely, in the poor remembrance of things past, there exists -- like a flower frozen in amber -- the autonomous, free-standing American state university. Perhaps in the McKinley era -- or was it in the time of Calvin Coolidge -- the state university stood tall, proud, free, independent. Presumably a statehouse clerk in green eye-shades delivered once each biennium a sack of dollars and then turned away shyly for the next two years while the university, in full enjoyment of its autonomy, proceeded in its fashion to perform the work of the university.

Such caricature contains trace elements of truth. The typical state university of a generation ago did operate in a world relatively free of external constraints. The university president in the 1940's dealt with relatively few accrediting agencies; he was a stranger to federal guidelines and affirmative action programs. He had not been introduced to the many constraints imposed by state coordinating boards, nor did he even contemplate the special delights associated with bargaining collectively with several unions -- including a union of the faculty itself. He was innocently unaware of the management help that would soon be contributed by state auditors, state architects, state civil service boards, state coordinating and/or

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controlling boards, and well-staffed standing committees of the state legislature.

It is tempting to envy the university administrators of a past now only dimly remembered: no computer print-outs of student credit hour costs, no thick reports on student station use, no cost centers in the medical college, no hopelessly technical calculations of indirect costs and research overhead; no abstruse arguments over the definitions of an F. T. E. faculty and F. T. E. students.

In those halcyon days of treasured independence, it is remembered that university presidents dealt frequently with faculty and occasionally with honest-to-God students. The student personnel movement had not developed; faculty and administrators naively believed that counseling students was largely the duty of faculty. For students in occasional trouble, we had a sex-oriented system -- namely a strong dean of men and an even stronger dean of women. It would be unfair to say that typically the dean of women and the dean of men were unlettered in matters of legal rights or untrained in the liturgy of sociology. To put it charitably, the Deans operated much as Judge Roy Bean once operated on the banks of the Pecos river. Malefactors were dealt with summarily. Justice was swift, and tempered occasionally with mercy. No appeals, thank you.

But enough of reminders of happier days -- happy, that is, for those

captains and sergeants of erudition who made up "the administration."

Today our publicly-supported institutions of higher learning operate under a thick web of constraints and controls foreign to their earlier experience. Simply to list some of these new constraints is to suggest the range and variety of unfamiliar intrusions into the internal life of the university.

* Our systems for record-keeping -- whether in personnel matters, the handling of radioactive waste, the policing of human subject research, or the accounting for faculty time on federal agency research projects -- are increasingly dictated by various federal agencies.
* State civil service laws and agencies create a special group -- the civil service -- with its own distinct salary, leave, and retirement sub-system.
* The architectural design, financing, and bidding of new buildings and the renovation of old buildings on campus is likely to be a bureaucratic obstacle course.
* Personnel controversies that were once resolved intramurally now move almost inexorably into a maze of commissions and courts, with the hapless institution sometimes caught in conflicting, even competing, jurisdictions.
* Entirely new legislation, such as the Occupational Safety

and Health Act, imposes new restrictions along with the burden of added costs.

* Specialized accrediting agencies nibble critically at the university, and with the best of intentions "cannibalize" the university.

* Finally -- as if to usher in 1984 -- universities, and even groupings of universities, are consolidated under a state super-board while state coordinating boards are transmuted into centralized control systems.

Thus do controls and constraints, rules and regulations and procedures descend upon the once autonomous university.

We in the university world have watched this accumulation of external authority over the life of the university in moods ranging from vague disquiet to near despair. Recently we have witnessed an acceleration in the imposition of external controls. All this has created a literature that is rich with the language of lamentation. We speak sadly of outside intervention, of intrusions into internal affairs, of the erosion of autonomy, of the homogenization of higher education, of the excesses of centralization. We lay full claim to the pejorative phrase, and saturate our lamentations with emotion-riddled words such as red tape, bureaucracy, politicization, and the like. In short, most of us bring to the new scene the fine discrimination and objectivity which the Chicago Tribune brought to the rôle of the federal government. The "burocracy" that Colonel McCormick made

famous now threatens to engulf us -- and we do not like it one bit!

In all this, clarity of thought would be served if we were to distinguish between the rhetoric of debate and political squabble on the one hand and the reality of substantive issues on the other hand. It may be good debating tactics for universities to talk of state bureaucrats, just as it is good tactics for state system people to talk about institutional insularity, narrow local perspectives, and the like. But such rhetoric does not help us to grapple thoughtfully with immensely difficult issues.

No state-supported institution anywhere exists apart from the state which created it and whose public interest it exists to serve. By the same token, no state coordinating agency, or any other agency of government for that matter, serves the great goals of efficiency, economy, and accountability unless it has a sophisticated and sensitive grasp of the transcendent importance of quality education, in all its rich and varied meanings.

We should expect that the individual university would have legitimate concerns about the kinds of intervention it experiences at the hands of external authority. But the state agency overseeing higher education also has equally legitimate concerns. Its public charge generally includes the wise use of resources, improved delivery of educational services to neglected constituencies and communities, the fair pricing of education, and the balanced development of all the constituent units that make up a state system. Both the university and the state system agency are accountable

to the public through their elected representatives. If the state agency "intrudes" in institutional affairs, as it frequently does, it is also true that the university may "intrude" in the domain of the state agency by actions that conflict with public obligations imposed on the state agency. Put simply, any unbridled provincialism on the part of the university is as threatening to the public interest as is the desire of state agencies to police universities for the sake of control itself.

Plainly the task ahead is to develop consultative relationships that bring the legitimate concerns of the individual institutions and the legitimate concerns of state agencies into shared perspectives. Warfare is too costly. Moreover, in most states both the universities and the state higher education agency share -- at the deepest level of conviction -- those multiple goals symbolized by words such as equity, efficiency, economy, excellence, pluralism, diversity, and the like. Our conflicts -- intense and passionate as they seem -- are hardly civil wars. Rather they are lover's quarrels by persons who see many things differently but who unite in strong conviction that the higher learning is our mutual concern and responsibility. Put still another way, some state control of public higher education is inescapable just as some substantial degree of institutional independence is indispensable. Our collective task is to make a planned "mesh of things." Wars of maneuver are poor substitutes for responsible, creative statecraft.

Our would-be controllers need to take to heart our lectures on the tyranny of excessive centralization and thoughtless intrusion. But those of us serving in the universities need to take to heart the admonition that we cease our lamentations and take a firmer hand in attacking those matters that are unmistakably within our direct responsibility.

We ask ourselves, "What is left on campus to govern?" almost as if to invite a cynical response. In moods of exhaustion, a president is tempted to say that he is left with all the distasteful tasks of governance: to divide a starvation budget equitably, to pacify a restless student body, to telephone the Mayor or Governor or National Guard to quell the streakers, to mediate intramural controversies, and to put a fair face on the disaster of a losing athletic team. However, as John Gardner has so often emphasized, these large systems within which we spend our working lives contain much more elbow room for personal initiative than we dare admit, especially to ourselves.

So what's left to govern? Just about everything.

* The lump sum appropriation is fairly common; we have the necessary legal freedom to alter priorities in the division of resources.
* Faculty and deans and vice presidents are not hired or fired by super-boards; this is our sweet privilege.

* The humane and efficient management of our dormitory systems is our task alone; no super-board in its right mind would have it otherwise.
* The initiative for seeking research grants, foundation largess, and private fund raising is exclusively ours.
* The demotion of losing coaches is everyone's interest but the exclusive burden of the president and/or the trustees.
* The organization of curricula and of courses of instruction is still our domain, as are methods of instruction and measures of student performance.
* We are free to reorganize our administrative structure, consolidate departments, create centers and institutes, pioneer in inter-disciplinary ventures, and join in inter-institutional cooperative ventures.
* As for the tenure system, this briar patch is ours to enjoy or to modify as we wish.

What else is in our domain? Well, we are free to revitalize liberal education, shorten the curricula, revise subject matter requirements, and even to alter drastically the internal system of governance. We are free -- thankfully -- to choose the text books, the library materials, and the laboratory equipment we desire; free to alter the standard tests used for admission to professional schools; free to open

classes in the evening; free to combat excesses of specialization; and free to run bars, restaurants, bookstores, art galleries, sports programs, alumni tours, overseas excursions, and all those other good things.

Perhaps we have more freedom, even with all the constraints, than we have the talent, courage, and imagination to exercise.

We are free to enforce the "no-smoking" signs in the classroom, to require full work for full pay, to equalize teaching loads, to police the manifest abuses of our grading systems to improve space utilization by using late afternoon hours for instruction, to recruit minorities (at least for the present) and even to expel star athletes who flunk Physical Education 101.

So what else is left to govern? Only educational policy in virtually every aspect -- that's all.

* We can despair in the face of the dreary statistics on the new depression in higher education, or we can change those educational policies and practices which deny working people of all ages equal access to educational opportunity and deny ourselves the market that we need to sustain enrollments.
* We can deplore the current emphasis on career training as the triumph of mere vocationalism, or we can fashion much improved counseling services along with planned

work-study experiences. There is simply no good reason why the world of work and the world of formal classroom instruction cannot be melded in creative ways which permit the student to test job interests while experiencing the relevance, or lack of relevance, of formal classroom instruction.

* We can limp along with the present system of requirements for a baccalaureate degree, or we can critically examine our systems -- more likely "non-systems" -- and find ways to save everyone's time. There is so nething terribly wrong when a typical student requires 4-1/2 years to complete a standard four-year program. Yet this wasteful stretch-out is now generally the common experience.

* We can cherish our few remaining overseas projects, lament the nation's new isolationism, deplore the fading interest of the foundations and the federal government in promoting an international dimension, or we can redefine our academic requirements to include a far more vivid sense of the diversity of world cultures and of our mutual dependence. The familiar incantations in defense of a foreign language requirement intone the symbols rather than the substance of cross-cultural understanding.

* We can be timorous in the face of collapsing standards and intellectual sloth, or we can insist that the fifty-minute classroom hour require intellectual rigor from teacher and student alike; that the grading system be fair and equitable; that the syllabus be coherent and relevant -- and that it be honored; and that the teaching-learning enterprise be infused throughout with an insistence on high quality performance.

Let's face it -- the agenda is crowded with tasks that are solely within the competence and concern of the individual college or university. In these great domains no state agencies constrain us, intrude upon us, or dictate to us.

It was Sartre who insisted that free men are "condemned to freedom". So it is with our colleges and universities. We are condemned to much more choice than we are prepared to acknowledge, let alone to face. It is much easier to rail at the insensitivity of "that world out there" -- the governors, legislators, state bureaucracies, and an "indifferent public" than it is to face up to the burden of choice.

But you ask, "whose choice?" And there is the rub! Is educational change the inescapable responsibility of the administration, with the faculty in an advice and consent and support role? Or is that collective entity, the faculty, finally responsible for educational policy, with the administration in a supporting role? As things now stand, one wonders who in the university

is accountable for what.

As is well known, faculty and administration stereotype one another, each imputing to the other more authority and less wisdom than in truth exists. The result is that most changes are "at the margins." Change does come, but it comes slowly, haltingly, clumsily. Much of the time our universities are in a state of "dynamic immobility" (a phrase borrowed from The Rector of a Latin-American university). It is not that we are static -- far from it. There are powerful forces at work, but these invite resistance from equally powerful countervailing forces: thus we are dynamic and immobile.

All this makes for easy evasion of responsibility. There is always a "they" standing between us and the changes we most want to make. In last analysis, there may be no ideal distribution of power and influence and responsibility within a university, but only makeshift accommodation in the context of interests forever in conflict.

And yet, there are some old truths which deserve a reaffirmation. The complications in governance that so frustrate the administrator and baffle the outside observer grow out of a very special, little understood aspect of teaching. Faculties are like policemen on the beat -- admittedly an observation destined to antagonize both tribal groups. Both are "reverse

discretion" hierarchies.[1] In the typical bureaucracy, organization is hierarchial; policy is developed at the top and refined at each level as it moves downward to the imposition of a control or the delivery of a service. But cops and professors enjoy an extraordinarily wide range of discretion precisely at that point where the control and/or service is delivered. Perhaps this is why both groups are skeptical, if not openly contemptuous, of headquarter's supervision and control. So too, this is why in the special world of the university no basic reform or change is possible without faculty support and understanding.

I realize that exhortation went out of style with Teddy Roosevelt. So if this is exhortation, make the most of it. The super-boards won't destroy higher education; the Congress of the United States won't save it; and national blue-ribbon commissions won't chart our destinies. Change is now the most stable element of our times and alienation is its deadly companion. Catch 22 captures the temper of the campus as well as that of the military. But what a profound misreading of those campus bureaucracies and university senates that we so enjoy parodying! The machinery for participation -- for governance if you will -- exists today on the North American campus. What does not exist is the willingness of enough persons who care -- and who, caring, are willing to work for their convictions.

1) I am indebted to Dr. James (Dolph) Norton, Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, for the useful reminder of a key concept in organizational theory. This definition helps explain why chiefs of police and college presidents enjoy careers easily brought to abrupt endings.

In cruel mimicry of the today's American politics, the free citizens of academia know in their hearts that not much can be done about anything. And so believing, they make it come true. What's left to govern is ourselves -- as Pogo the Philosopher once told us.